

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1732

INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

DIA WASHDC

HQ, USSOUTHCOM, SCJ2

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGO, PFOR, UY

SUBJECT: DR. APARICIO MENDEZ TO BE PRESIDENT

REF: MONTEVIDEO 2623

1. SUMMARY: DR. APRICIO MENDEZ WAS DESIGNATED JULY 14 BY UNANIMOUS VOTE IN THE COUNCIL OF THE NATION TO ASSUME THE PRESIDENCY OF URUGUAY SEPTEMBER 1, 1976. HIS TERM OF OFFICE WILL BE FOR FIVE YEARS. MENDEZ, UPON ACCEPTING THE DESIGNATION, MADE NO STARTLING PRONOUNCEMENTS. HE INDICATED THAT THE WORK OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE AND THERE WOULD BE NO IMMEDIATE CHANGES IN THE CABINET. THE ROLE OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES APPEARS LIKELY TO BE SMALL AND THERE WILL BE CLEANUP AND REGULATION OF THOSE PARTIES. THE CHANGE IN PRESIDENTS IS NOT EXPECTED TO AFFECT U.S. INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

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2. DR. APARICIO MENDEZ, 72 YEAR OLD LAWYER AND PROFESSOR,

WAS DESIGNATED LATE WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, TO BE URUGUAY'S FIFTY-THIRD PRESIDENT. MENDEZ WILL TAKE OFFICE SEPTEMBER 1, 1976, AND WILL SERVE FOR FIVE YEARS.

3. BY UNANIMOUS VOTE OF THE MEMBERS PRESENT IN THE COUNCIL OF THE NATION MENDEZ WAS DESIGNATED TO OCCUPY THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT FOR THE PERIOD 1976-1981. IN A SEPARATE ACTION, IT WAS DECIDED THAT THE TERM WILL BEGIN SEPTEMBER 1. COUNCILORS OF STATE MARIA LUISA COOLIGAN SANGUINETTI, MARIO GAGGERO, JUAN CARLOS PONS, AND JORGE SPANGENBERG WERE NOT PRESENT AT THE SESSION. COOLIGHAN SAID PRIVATELY SHE HAD RESIGNED. PONS, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN ON LEAVE FOR SOME TIME AND SPANGENBERG WAS SAID TO BE TRAVELING. ALL MILITARY MEMBERS SAVE GENERAL CRISTI (ILL) AND REAR ADMIRAL SANGURGO, WERE PRESENT. THE NEW PRESIDENT WAS NOMINATED BY ARMY CINC GENERAL JULIO CESAR VADORA WHO DECLARED THAT IT WAS THE ARMED FORCES' DESIRE TO HAVE A CANDIDATE WHO WAS NOT A MEMBER OF THE MILITARY. THE ARMED FORCES DID, HOWEVER, WANT TO NOMINATE A MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE CONTINUITY OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

4. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING THE DESIGNATION, MENDEZ INDICATED THAT THE PRESENT POLICIES OF THE GOVERNMENT WILL REMAIN IN EFFECT. INITIALLY, AT LEAST, ALL CABINET MEMBERS WILL REMAIN IN OFFICE. MENDEZ STRESSED THAT HE WAS CHOSEN FROM AMONGST THE GOVERNING "TEAM" AND THUS COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO INSTITUTE WHOLESALE CHANGES.

5. REFERRING TO THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES, MENDEZ SAID, "NOT ONLY DO I BELIEVE THAT THE PRESENCE OF THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES IS NECESSARY, BUT, I FEEL MY PRESENCE HERE IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT I BELIEVE THAT THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES CAN ONLY BE ELIMINATED BY HISTORY, NOT BY ANY GOVERNMENT OR DECREE."

6. MENDEZ, HOWEVER, INDICATED THAT THERE WOULD BE A "CLEANUP" AND REGULATION" OF POLITICAL PARTIES. THE CLEANUP WOULD BE APPLIED TO MEMBERS OF THE PARTIES. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF BLACKBALLING CERTAIN POLITICIANS FROM CIVIL LIFE, HE INDICATED THAT CAUTION WOULD BE NECESSARY IN THIS AREA. "WE ARE NOT GOING TO GO OUT WITH A SWORD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CUTTING OFF HEADS, NOR ARE WE GOING TO DIVIDE THE COUNTRY INTO TWO." THE CLEANUP WOULD COME FIRST, AND SOON, AND, ACCORDING TO HIS THINKING, IT WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY A CAREFUL STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE PARTIES WITH AN EYE TOWARDS THEIR REGULATION. HE OFFERED HIS PERSONAL OPINION THAT THE PARTIES WOULD NOT BE CONSULTED IN THE CLEANUP AND REGULATION PHASE.

7. FINALLY, MENDEZ CALLED FOR THE END OF A SYSTEM WHICH

FORMERLY PLACED THE PARTY SYSTEM BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT. "THAT IS, ELIMINATE THE PROFESSIONAL POLITICIAN, THE MEN WHO FOR GENERATIONS, THROUGH WELL-KNOWN FAMILIES... HAD A MONOPOLY ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS. LET PEOPLE ENTER GOVERNMENT WITHOUT HAVING TO BEG FOR VOTES. DO NOT LET EVERY ELECTION DISTURB THE LIFE OF THE COUNTRY FOR TWELVE MONTHS. LET A MAN ACT IN CONGRESS WITHOUT HAVING TO THINK OF REELECTION. ALL OF THAT IS PART OF THE NEW ORDER WE ARE PREPARING."

8. THE ONLY EDITORIAL COMMENT, THUS FAR, APPEARED IN EL DIA, WHICH HAS IN THE PAST BEEN THY MOST OUTSPOKEN ADVOCATE OF A PROMPT OPENING TO THE PARTIES. IN THIS INSTANCE, WHILE QUESTIONING CERTAIN OF THE PROCESSES BY WHICH MENDEZ WAS DESIGNATED THE NEXT PRESIDENT, THE EDITORIAL STATED THERE WERE MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES AND THAT THE PROCESS STILL LEFT HOPE FOR AN EVENTUAL RETURN TO DEMOCRACY.

9. IN REFERRING TO THE CLOSED AND SECRET SESSION, WHICH DESIGNATED MENDEZ AS THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF URUGUAY, EL DIA COMMENTED THAT THE PROCESS OF ANOINTING A SUCCESSOR INVOLVED A METHOD IN WHOSE JUSTIFICATION WAS INVOKED THE "REQUIREMENTS OF NECESSITY." IT WAS "A PROCESS WHICH WAS ABSOLUTELY FOREIGN TO OUR CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TO OUR REPUBLICAN TRADITIONS. THESE HAVE ALWAYS DICTATED THAT THE HIGHEST OFFICE SHOULD BE CONFERRED ON AN INDIVIDUAL BY MEANS OF THE POPULAR VOTE, AT ONE OR TWO STAGES OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, IN THE FREE PLAY OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, AFTER PUBLIC AND OPEN DEBATE...(HOWEVER) THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE PRESENT DESIGNATE WAS CHOSEN ARE NOT NORMAL ONES. "THE SITUATION IN WHICH THE COUNTRY FINDS ITSELF--IN WHICH THE COUNCIL OF THE NATION, UPON ITS INAUGURATION, APTLY

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DESCRIBED AS THE MOST DIFFICULT MOMENT IN OUR CONTEMPORARY HISTORY--HAS TO BE CONFRONTED WITHOUT THE POPULAR ENDORSEMENT, WHICH DEMOCRACY REQUIRES, OF THE RULER, WHO THUS KNOWS HIMSELF TO HAVE THE INCONTROVERTIBLE ATTRIBUTE OF HAVING BEEN SUPPORTED BY THE MAJORITY OPINION OF THE CITIZENRY EXPRESSED FREELY BY MEANS OF THE VOTE...BUT, THIS BY NO MEANS, DIMINISHES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NEW DESIGNEE."

THE EDITORIAL STATED THAT WHILE EL DIA HAS OFTEN DISAGREED IDEOLOGICALLY AND ON PRACTICAL GROUNDS WITH THE NEW DESIGNEE, APARICIO MENDEZ, THAT HIS RECORD OF BEING A JURIST, AN EXPERIENCED PROFESSOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW, AND A MAN WITH A LONG RECORD IN PUBLIC LIFE GAVE IT HOPE THAT HE HAS "THE APTITUDE TO HELP OVERCOME (WHAT MENDEZ CALLED) THE INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS WHICH, IN THE TRANSITION BETWEEN HISTORIC STAGES, HAVE LAMENTABLY PRODUCED TEARS IN THE SOCIAL FABRIC AND POLITICAL COMMOTION' AND, ALSO TO RETURN' AS SOON
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AS POSSIBLE, TO THE EQUILIBRIUM OF NORMALCY."

IN CONCLUSION, THE EDITORIAL STATED THAT IN THIS "HOUR OF THE REPUBLIC, IT (EL DIA) RENEWS WITH ALL ITS MORAL FORCE (OF 90 YEARS OF SERVICE IN THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY) ITS UNDIMINISHED FAITH IN THE COUNTRY AND IN ITS PEOPLE AND IN THE ASSURED, INEVITABLE, AND FINAL VICTORY OF DEMOCRACY."

10. AS IN THE PREVIOUS CHANGE IN PRESIDENTS, IT APPEARS GOU POLICIES WILL CONTINUE AS BEFORE, THUS, LEAVING BASIC US INTERESTS UNAFFECTED.
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